

Press release

Gender gap in sports narrows as girls and boys kick traditional divides into touch

The dividing lines between what are thought of as predominantly men's and women's sports are disappearing as girls increasingly take up traditionally male sports and vice versa.

Data from the annual **CHILDWISE Monitor Report**, released to celebrate **National School Sports Week 2017** (26-30 June) shows that girls' participation in *football, cricket, rugby* and *basketball*, all previously considered as boys sports, is on the increase, while more boys are taking part in sports like *netball* and *gymnastics*.

36% of girls aged 7 to 16 now play football at school (up from 32% in 2007), 20% play cricket (9% in 2007), 16% play rugby (6% in 2007) and 31% now play basketball (19% in 2007), whilst boys' participation in these sports has changed little. Meanwhile, more boys are now playing netball (16% compared to 4% in 2007) and doing gymnastics (18%, 6% in 2007).

Children claim to take part in around **two and a half hours of sport at school per week**, a figure that has remained constant over many years, with boys consistently more likely to be taking part in more sport than girls. Children on the whole feel this is about right, but a significant minority would like to do more.

"PE is a compulsory subject on the National Curriculum, for children of all ages, and while the government no longer recommends a minimum number of hours of PE in schools a week, there is an unofficial two hour target, which it seems from our research that most children are receiving" says Simon Leggett, Research Director from CHILDWISE.

Earlier this year, CHILDWISE reported on a sharp increase in the number of teenage girls taking part in sport at school, and suggested that this positive shift might be an effect of many years of public campaigning (eg. This Girl Can / Like a Girl) and female success at the London and Rio Olympics.

"For some children, especially 15-16 year olds, the amount of sport they are able to take part in at school is still far below their ideal", says Leggett.

Over the last decade, children's participation in all sports at school other than football have increased significantly, suggesting that there is now provision in schools allowing more children to take part in a **more diverse range of sports**, including those that were traditionally more gender biased.

Football has always been the main sport that children say they enjoy at school, with around half of children playing at school. Whilst it is most popular amongst boys (consistently their top sport), more than a third of girls say they play at school.

Athletics is a particular success story in schools, with general participation rising over the years, to a point where it is now the second most played school sport, with twice as many children taking part now compared with ten years ago. Over the years, girls' interest has increased – they are now more likely than boys to do Athletics at school, and it is one of their top sports.

“Recent years have seen team GB success in athletics at the Olympics, particularly amongst female athletes, with high profile athletes emerging, such as Jessica Ennis-Hill, Mo Farah, and Usain Bolt. All of this together with increasing social interaction via social media, is bound to have stirred interest in athletics at school amongst children” says Leggett.

Fitness Training is the fastest growing activity at school, with three times more children doing this now than in the past. Less a sport than a lifestyle choice, girls are marginally more likely to be using these facilities at school.

Basketball has gone from being a sport for boys, to one where participation is equal amongst girls and boys, with three in ten children taking part. Equally, **Cricket** is now only marginally more likely to be played by boys, where once boys were three times more likely than girls to take part.

Boys participation in **Rugby** is little over the last decade, with all of the growth in the girls' sport – boys are still twice more likely to take part, but girls are now three times more likely to play than they were in the past.

Conversely, whilst **Netball** is still predominantly played by girls, numbers of boys playing have quadrupled over the last ten years. The same can be said for **Gymnastics**, still dominated by girls, but with boys three times more likely to take part than they used to be. And **Swimming**, once very popular with girls, is now a sport that girls and boys are equally likely to take part in at school.

Findings of the report also include...

- **Outside of school**, children spend around three hours a week doing sporting activities, with boys and older children the most active
- **Football** is the main sport children take part in outside of school, closely followed by **Swimming** and **Cycling** (35%, 30% and 23% respectively)
- Half of children **go to watch live sports** (49%), but this proportion is falling over time – **Football** remains the number one sport children go to see (31% attend)

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The Monitor Report 2017 covers... Tablets and technology; websites and applications; gaming, YouTube; mobile phones; TV viewing; video on demand; music; reading ; children's equipment; money; purchasing; sports & activities; health & wellbeing and social awareness.

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